

Breaking trail

Leave behind the resorts where everybody goes and find a ski destination that has everything you want, with the added attraction of originality

Fed up with bumping into the guy from the next office in the cable car queue, or seeing that woman from the school run eating raclette? Make first tracks in resorts that are just as good – and get everyone asking where you went this winter.

You love the glamour of Courchevel...

See-and-be-seen mountain restaurants (eg Cap Horn); fashionable hotels (eg Byblos), but it feels like the whole City has decamped there.

► Try Madonna di Campiglio, Italy

Madonna, in Trentino, is where Ferrari holds its annual F1 launch – 10-16 January sees Felipe Massa ski racing, Fernando Alonso driving a go-kart on ice and Luca di Montezemolo looking suave. The most stunning section of the Alps, the Dolomites are ragged, terracotta stacks, under which there is relaxing skiing on wide red and blue runs. However the food and drink is so good at Chalet Fiat (designed after the new Cinquecento – all white and modern) and Rifugio Boch (with a great terrace in the sun), it's hard to leave. At dusk, it's Moncler puffs galore in the nightly passeggiata. There are excellent four-star hotels, including the new Dolce Vita. Rooms are themed, some in tribute to Italian climbing legends; and there are luxurious touches such as homemade cantucci with coffee, and a spa treatment room built from Himalayan salt blocks. chaletdolcevita.it; momentum.uk.com

You admired the designer hotels of St Moritz...

'Hip hotels' Saratz and Misani took on St Moritz's grand dames. Now they're part of the establishment.

► Try Åre, Sweden

Åre is bursting with that Swedish design ethos that ensures everything has an attractive functionality. Wooden buildings are painted in delicious shades of brown; bars have tongue-and-groove panelling and intricate wallpaper but aren't cluttered with the usual Alpine bric-a-brac. There are venerable mountain hotels: Åre Torg, a bunkhouse in cool monochrome; and most recently, a new design icon in glowing ductile metal: Copperhill Resort. Architect Peter Bohlin, who built Bill Gates' mansion, designed two projecting pine wings and a vast atrium clad in copper (once mined here). There are further local touches in carpets based on indigenous Sami people's dress patterns and a spa with wooden huts, where you lie on reindeer skins, being massaged with birch oil and listening to *jajk* folk songs. As well as skiing, Åre also offers great snowmobiling and dog-sledding. copperhill.se; hotellaretorg.se; skistar.com

You rely on the guaranteed snow of Lech...

Altitude and good snow; but with elegant Austrian hotels, not high-rise French apartments. But in late 2009, it still trades on Princess Diana's patronage.

► Try Obergurgl, Austria

An isolated village at the end of the Ötztal valley, with skiing up to 3,080m, which means snow certainty. The ski area improved dramatically in the Nineties when Ober- and Hochgurgl were linked at altitude and now the high-point is topped by the striking Top Mountain Star bar. The village is a collection of classy hotels, either in the traditional Austrian, family, six-course meal with dumplings-style, or sleekly modern in the case of the funky Josl. The whole place is well served for family holidays, with good ski schools and childminding.

josl.at; espritski.com

You enjoyed Fernie when it was a bit obscure...

Once the British Columbian antidote to mass-market Whistler or Banff; great skiing, quirky town. Now coachloads of Brits go there.

► Try Mount Hood, Oregon

Mount Hood is a dormant volcano in Oregon with three ski areas on its flanks, including Palmer Snowfield, location of Timberline Lodge. You want

quirky? The Lodge served as the exterior of the Overlook Hotel in *The Shining*. The unique building, opened in 1937 by President Roosevelt (with linens, wrought iron and carved woodwork all done by hand), was created by unemployed craftsmen during the Depression as a federal make-work project; and, because of that, the nearby town is called Government Camp. Make it a road trip, starting in fashionable, alternative Portland; and going on to Bend, base for Mount Bachelor (at over 3,000 acres, bigger than Fernie or Breckenridge) and home to five of Oregon's 100+ breweries. timberlinelodge.com; wando.com/ski

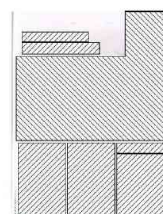
You thrill to the off-piste skiing in Sainte Foy...

Once known as 'where Val d'Isère's instructors ski on their day off'; now as developed as its neighbour.

► Try Andermatt, Switzerland

Pleasant restaurants such as Apotheke and quaint, wood-panelled hotels such as the Sonne make for quiet evenings in this charming, sleepy old village.

It's all about early nights and hitting the slopes early. And what slopes: although an antiquated, limited lift system means limited piste skiing, it also results in vast tracts of untouched terrain for off-piste riding. There are high glaciers and gullies, gentle meadows, wooded sections – and barely another skier around to horn in on your fresh tracks. And freshies are common: this crossroads of the Alps is what the locals call a Schneewinkl (snow pocket). But hurry. Egyptian developer Samih Sawiris has started work on a CHF1 billion redevelopment project. hotelsonneanderematt.ch; freshtracks.org.uk



You relax in the Latin style of Courmayeur...

Sunny, relaxed skiing, long lunches and fine Italian dinners. But, as host to the City Ski Championships, not exactly unfamiliar to your colleagues.

► Try Baqueira Beret, Spain

Baqueira Beret may be located in a remote Pyrenéan valley with its own language, Aranese, but it is determinedly Spanish – even King Juan Carlos and

his family ski there, in three sectors with 108km of pistes. There are tapas bars around the valley (with plenty of seafood, since the Galician coast is close), as well as the excellent La Borda Lobató, a converted barn serving Desperate Dan-scale beef. You can also laze at the five-star Hotel La Pleta, where the local speciality, cassis, is used in spa massages as well as in the bar, which also offers 21 gins and three different tonics. The hotel is furnished in that heavy dark wood that's so typical of Spain.

lapleta.com; crystalfinest.co.uk

You revel in Vail and Aspen's hidden steeps...

Luxurious, well-groomed resorts with less obvious hardcore sectors (Vail's Back Bowls; Aspen Highlands), but everyone's done Colorado.

► Try Deer Valley, Utah

This makes Vail and Aspen look downmarket. There are valets to carry your skis from car park to chair lift; utterly bump-free trails; limits on lift tickets sold; a ban on snowboarding; and five-star hotels such as the Stein Eriksen Lodge. However, there are also double-black-diamond steeps in Daly Chutes and Mayflower Bowl. A backcountry tour crosses super-dry Utah powder to Park City (with its mighty Jupiter Bowl), Solitude, Snowbird and old-school off-piste Shangri-La, Alta. Contrary to its reputation, Utah is only a dry state snow-wise: there are several microbreweries and the Sundance film festival is held in Park City and Deer Valley every January.

steinlodge.com; ski-i.com

You enjoyed the party hotel, Riderspalace, Laax...

Exciting Swiss concept when it opened, catering to young, cool snowboarders: bunkrooms, lobby nightclub, Playstations everywhere. But it's so 2001.

► Try the grown-up Rocksresort, Laax

The new development next door to Riderspalace is billed as the accommodation people graduate to when they've had enough of that party hotel. Grey stone apartment blocks look like square boulders left by a retreating glacier. Inside the unusually large apartments there is more Valser stone, limewashed concrete and oak panels that give the bedrooms the cosy feel of Swiss cattle barns. Modern styling touches include distinctly unchintzy Cassina furniture, Alessi tableware and lamps from Catellani & Smith, as well as wet rooms that can be sealed to create a steam room. Shops, restaurants and ticket offices are all handily located in various cubes. You can ride Laax's huge open bowls and terrain parks as a packed-lunching snow bum, or dine at places like La Vacca, a smoky on-mountain yurt which serves nothing but steak and red wine, or the 14-point Gault-Millaut restaurant Mulania.

rocksresort.com; crystalfinest.co.uk ✱

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Clockwise from left: Utah powder snow in Deer Valley; Top Mountain Star bar, Obergurgl; an apartment at Laax's Rocksresort

